Americans' Whole-Grain Consumption Below Guidelines

Evidence indicates that eating whole grains can reduce the risk of heart disease and some cancers. The newly revised *Dietary Guidelines for Americans*, released in January 2005, recommend that half of all daily grain servings be whole grains. For an individual who consumes 2,200 calories a day, this would mean eating 3½ ounces of whole grains a day, equal to 1½ cups of cooked brown rice or 3½ slices of whole-wheat bread.

Food availability and food intake data tell us that most Americans are not meeting these guidelines. Historically, Americans have consumed ever-increasing amounts of refined-grain products and fewer servings of whole grains. ERS researchers annually calculate the amount of food available for human consumption in the United States. The food availability data measure the flow of raw and semi-processed food commodities through the U.S. marketing system. Between 1972 and 2003, per capita annual availability of all grain products increased 46 percent, from 133 pounds per person to 194 pounds per person.

After adjusting the availability data for waste and losses, Americans were eating, on average, 10 servings of grains a day in 2003—three servings more than recommended by the new dietary guidelines for someone who consumes 2,200 calories per day. Of those 10 servings, whole grains accounted for just over 1 serving. In food intake surveys from 1999-2000, nearly 40 percent of Americans did not report eating any whole grains in an entire day.

In the past, dietary changes have developed slowly over time. Food manufacturers can serve as catalysts to change by quickly responding to or even anticipating dietary trends. ERS researchers found that for those consumers who said they ate whole-grain foods, the bulk of those foods consisted of whole-grain crackers, salty snacks, and ready-to-eat cereals. Responding to greater emphasis on the health benefits of whole grains, General Mills announced that it would reformulate all of its breakfast cereals to qualify them as either a good or excellent source of whole grains. As other major food manufacturers change product formulations and introduce new whole-grain products, consumers may find whole-grain products more plentiful.

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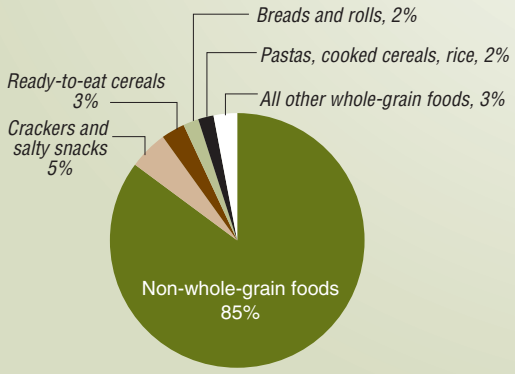
How Americans consume their grains



Source: ERS analysis of 1999-2000 National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) data.

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ERS annually calculates the amount of grains and several hundred other foods available for consumption in the U.S. This series provides data back to 1909 for many commodities and is the only continuous source of data on food and nutrient availability in the U.S. For more information, visit www.ers.usda.gov/data/foodconsumption.

Packers turned to marketing contracts to maintain incentives for producing leaner hogs and, at the same time, control PSE-related attributes. These marketing contracts strove to limit PSE problems by specifying and monitoring input requirements—most importantly genetic lines. How hogs are handled also influences PSE. For example, minimal force while moving hogs, nonslip loading ramps, and less crowding of hogs while on the way to the packing plant all make for less stressed hogs.

While considerable progress has been made in breeding out the stress gene, two pork quality audits revealed that the PSE condition actually worsened—rising from 10.2 percent of slaughter hogs in 1992 to 15.5 percent in 2002. This suggests hog-handling problems may have become an important contributor to PSE-related problems. Some large pork companies stipulate in their marketing contracts that producers raise hogs in a humane manner or in a way that optimizes pork quality.

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This finding is drawn from . . .
Pork Quality and the Role of Market Organization, by Steve W. Martinez and Kelly Zering, AER-835, USDA/ERS, October 2004, available at: www.ers.usda.gov/publications/aer835/